

Listing of Claims

The current status of all the claims of the application follows:

Claims 1 - 16. (Cancelled)

Claim 17. (Currently Amended) A process for increasing the decolorizing activity of a layer silicate for treatment of oils, fats and waxes comprising the step of

~~treating the without the addition of an acid, other than the acid produced by an acid-producing microorganism, activating the layer silicate, which has a pH value greater than 3.4, with an by the addition of acid-producing microorganism until a pH value of not more than about 3.4 of the layer silicate between 2 and 4 is obtained.~~

Claim 18. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 wherein the layer silicate comprises a smectite clay.

Claim 19. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 wherein the layer silicate comprises a montmorillonite clay.

Claim 20. (Original) The process of Claim 19 wherein the montmorillonite clay comprises a bentonite clay.

Claim 21. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 wherein the layer silicate comprises a palygorskite clay.

Claim 22. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 20 wherein the layer silicate further comprises a palygorskite clay.

Claim 23. (Original) The process of Claim 17 wherein the

acid-producing microorganism comprises a sulfur-oxidizing bacteria.

Claim 24. (Original) The process of Claim 17 wherein the acid-producing microorganism comprises an iron-oxidizing bacteria.

Claim 25. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 23 wherein the sulfur-oxidizing bacteria comprises Thiobacillus thiooxidans.

Claim 26. (Previously Amended) The process of Claim 24 wherein the iron-oxidizing bacteria comprises Thiobacillus ferrooxidans.

Claim 27. (Original) The process of Claim 17 wherein the acid-producing microorganism produces citric acid.

Claim 28. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 27 wherein the citric acid-producing microorganism comprises Aspergillus niger.

Claim 29. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 wherein the layer silicate is in the form of raw clay and wherein the process further comprises breaking up the raw clay into clumps with a size from about 0.5 cm to about 5 cm prior to treating the layer silicate.

Claim 30. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 further comprising adding the acid-producing microorganisms to an inoculant material prior to treating the layer silicate with the microorganisms which have been added to the inoculant material.

Claim 31. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 30

wherein the population of the microorganisms added to the layer silicate is from about 10^2 to about 10^{10} bacteria/g of the inoculant material.

Claim 32. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 further comprising maintaining the temperature of the layer silicate during treating within the range from about 20 to about 35°C.

Claim 33. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 further comprising maintaining the water content of the layer silicate during treating within a range from about 15 percent by weight to about 70 percent by weight.

Claim 34. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 30 wherein the inoculant material added to the layer silicate comprises about 5 to about 20 percent of the overall composition after the inoculant material has been added.

Claim 35. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 further comprising mixing and aerating the layer silicate while it is being treated with the acid-producing microorganism.

Claim 36. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 35 wherein the treating process occurs for a period of time from about 1 to about 365 days.

Claim 37. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 further comprising adding nutrients for the microorganisms to the layer silicate prior to treating with the acid-producing

microorganisms.

Claim 38. (Original) The process of Claim 37 wherein the nutrients added comprise sulfur-containing products.

Claim 39. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 further comprising adding small quantities of a dilute acid to the layer silicate prior to treating with the acid-producing microorganisms.

Claim 40. (Cancelled)

Claim 41. (Cancelled)

Claim 42. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 17 wherein the pH level is determined by suspending 8 parts of a sample of the treated layer silicate in 100 parts of water and measuring the pH-value by means of a pH measurement electrode.

Claim 43. (Cancelled)

Claim 44. (Cancelled)

Claim 45. (Cancelled)